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ABSTRACT

Three evaluators with different backgrounds and interests were involved in a program evaluation at Cornell University's Center for International Studies, where two of the evaluators had serious conflicts and the third served as an in-house mediator. The third evaluator questioned why he had credibility with the first two, looked at how he developed professional and interpersonal skills, examined how he reinforced a task-oriented atmosphere, analyzed how he worked, assessed his role effectiveness, and summarized how the entire process helped him. He saw his role as that of a facilitator/consultant/problem solver. (BJG)

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IMPACTS ON A SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGIST-CONSULTANT

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You have a picture of overlapping spheres of action -- the Center of International Studies (CIS), the faculty of the courses, and Brown, Paine and Brock as the first; the second as Center for Improvement of Undergraduate Education (CIUE), featuring Brock, Paine and me. Paine was located in both spheres, Brock was also -- but less actively in the period of my concern; Brown was mostly intra-CIS, and I was strictly intra-CIUE.

You've heard the problems Paine and Brock had. I was brought in as in-house consultant, translator, mediator, etc., at a pretty early stage of the Brock-Paine conferences, say, late September.

Question 1. How did I fit in? I had some credibility in both men, based on:

a) My general background in research and teaching various social sciences (social psychology, anthropology, sociology, economics, even a concentration and interdisciplinary research on rural development);

b) From intermittent instances and the summer together at CIUE, Brock and I shared respect for each other's interests and abilities;

c) Paine had a need for a "friend-in-camp" at CIUE, and my background made me easily relevant. This was accepted because Paine found he could trust me -- no tales behind his back, no two-faced dealings, etc.

d) Finally, the content area of the study, plus my relationship with Brock, gave me confidence in my own credibility -- for this was a quite new kind of role for me.

Question 2. What feelings did I bring to the task of mediator and/collaborator?

a) I had a lot of sympathy/empathy regarding Paine's being somewhat "at sea" vis-a-vis the questions Brock was trying to ask. I've been there too. And in this situation, Brock had to educate me some to understand the meanings of his project interests;

b) There were some feelings I had to control. I felt I had a strong background (learning, research, teaching) in the content of the first course to be evaluated. As Paine reflected the main professor's performance and theory, I had feelings I could do a better job. It's entirely possible this is an endemic problem for evaluators -- namely to respect the performance as given, when the evaluator may or may not think she/he knows more than the performer. Moreover, as I came to understand Brock's conceptual concerns, linked with my research abilities, I had some feelings I could do the research more efficaciously than Paine.

c) But I didn't let these dominate. Why?

i) This research/evaluation was not my formal assignment and Paine had been specially hired on

a grant to do it. I was on more "general" money;

ii) I had plenty to learn to prove myself within my main responsibilities -- since it was my first Educational-Evaluation position. Also, my preference is very much for direct, systematic comparative analyses -- I didn't want to have Paine's responsibilities for so "nebulous" a program.

Speaking of my preference, I think it may be useful to characterize the "professional preferences" of us three:

Brock -- principally interested in new conceptual knowledge, with method sort of "philosophical" questioning, exploring assumptions, usages, meanings.

Paine -- evaluation: analysis of empirical reality with an un-mechanical, less categorical "systems" viewpoint to find "natural" elements and their interrelationships.

Macklin -- hypothesis specification and deductive research; predict the important questions and answers and test them by extraction from reality, creating thereby an "artificial reality".

All these can strengthen one another -- as we have have indeed found. However, our natural lines of thinking accentuated the differences and lack of understanding.

One of the genuinely positive impacts has been to learn more fully what each orientation can do for the others, and to understand how more clearly.

iii) I respected Paine's ability to deal with and advise the less-than-cooperative faculty of Rural Development course. He had more knowledge of teaching techniques and ways to interact than I did.

Question 3. I took, and reinforced, the group's (Brock-Paine-me) priority as task-oriented, not affective. Why?

a) Brock's request for my assistance concerned "things" and activities", not some kind of statement of "we can't get along".

b) There was a strong implicit assumption among all of us that we are "mature people", able to work out our differences while being productive.

c) Contributing to this was the fact that we all conceived of CIUE as a work group. Paine stresses pre-existant regarding this -- even though our Center is small, so each individual has a highly visible effect, it's still an ongoing organization one has to "fit into".

d) As stated, the time pressures were felt very strongly right at the start -- the first course to be evaluated was underway; our mistaken idea of what was required -- some thorough, lengthy statement -- for the first OE Progress Report at the end of the first three months.

e) Each of us, when faced with an interpersonal problem prefers to approach it intellectually, analytically. Probably there's a continuum here, from problem-solving to unconscious defense -- so a consistent retreat into defensiveness would be available potentially. Academic selection and training reinforces this sort of personal style. For us, this contributed to the consequence that there was an implicit agreement on "how to define the problem", i.e., it was mainly a cognitive one.

(Some questioning of one another's competence existed, but no one permitted it to predominate in his perception.)

f) Brock and I lacked direct experience with the possibilities and limitations of an emotionally focused (e.g., "encounter") confrontation and resolution. Therefore, we weren't about to experiment with it under severe time pressures.

g) Paine had significant human relations training. I didn't want to inexpertly invade his turf -- which would result in my losing any effectiveness and not advance solution to the problem either.

Question 4. How did I work?

a) I was "on call" in effect, as we had a small office, a high priority task, and my time allocations were flexible.

b) Each could "ventilate" to me separately, so meetings of

the three of us didn't have to be "heavy" emotional confrontations. We talk out some differences, find some possible convergences or "better ideas". But I always took care not to align myself to either person. Also, if I thought an idea was being pushed on me in a I:I situation that I believed the other person would question/ disagree with, I deliberately and explicitly resisted closure -- so it could be discussed by the three of us. I noted the intellectualizing bent of all of us -- the danger that seemed most probable in the process was both

i) instances of polarization, and

ii) the accretion of these into strong, antagonistic general positions. (Each of these people, Brock and Paine, had a strong, not necessarily latent, "need to be right".

c) I tried to help the cognitive tasks forward -- they accepted me as an equal in our discussions, in seeking clarity, agreable compromises and syntheses, defining choices, etc. Typically, I took as given, or relied on asking them "the facts". Only in recent months -- as we're putting the Final Report together -- have I developed a comprehensive view of the courses, the International Studies Center, the faculty, etc. The need to do this comes from the more active and independent content-related role I've assumed. -- Going back to Paine's distinction

of "lumpers vs. splitters", I'm working on the lumping side.

Question 5. Did the role I played, and the fit of that role into the whole nexus have a consequence on our work that could be labelled "loss-minimization", as opposed to a gain-maximization, via confrontation? Briefly, the answer would have to be yes -- but in the light of so many powerful factors pushing us in this same direction, its questionable the alternative was a possibility.

However, we have also worked in a way that moves us from the extreme of mere "loss-minimization" -- namely, by extending the amount of time we've put into the entire project and by gaining added leverage from what we've learned from each other.

Question 6. What have been the main outcomes or "impacts" for me?

a) I've been fortunate in <u>not</u> experiencing any crises or incipient crises in relation to this study. That we're reaching the end, with a final product, reflects well on us all -- and that has to include me.

b) I've gained in my interpersonal/listening skills, with probably the biggest <u>conscious</u> aspect an increase in my confidence to undertake such.

c) Also, I'm more aware of what it means to do heavy conceptual "work" and how you can go about it. This usefully supplements the typical social science ability to analyze into parts and to generalize a little.

d) The biggest impact has been as a major experience in the whole process I've gone through since joining CIUE: of moving from my previous definition of my professional

self as a producer of identifiable products (research, teaching), which provide a form of proving-oneself, to the more nebulous, no-final-product-identifiability role as facilitator/consultant/problem-solver. I'm getting more comfortable with this, but I still want some of the other.